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PARIS FOR ZEYA, LONDON FOR TSOU

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/13/2016

TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [SY](#)

SUBJECT: RIAD SEIF, FOUR OTHERS ARRESTED AT DEMONSTRATION;  
SEIF RELEASED

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Stephen A. Seche for reasons 1.4(b)/(d)  
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¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Prominent opposition figure Riad Seif and four others were arrested on March 12 while participating in a predominantly Kurdish demonstration in front of the Prime Minister's office. According to human rights activists, Seif was arrested by State Security agents and was released several hours later on the night of the 12th, but has been called in for interrogation with a senior State Security officer on March 13. The other four detained demonstrators have been transferred to the Political Security Directorate (PSD). END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) Prominent opposition figure Riad Seif was arrested by SARG authorities on March 12 while participating in a demonstration commemorating the March 2004 Qamishli rioting. According to human rights activist Rezan Zeituneh, who also participated in the demonstration, approximately 250 demonstrators, mainly Kurds, held vigil in front of the Prime Minister's Office on the morning of March 12. Zeituneh noted her surprise that there was also a relatively strong showing of Arab party leaders in attendance, including Seif and the leaders of a number of communist/socialist groupings.

¶3. (C) According to Zeituneh, the protest was allowed to take place for 20 minutes. Police officers then told protesters that all (non-Kurd) Arab participants had to leave. When they refused, Seif was swarmed by riot police and taken away. Riot police then proceeded to beat the other protesters as well, resulting in the injury of the president of the Revolutionary Workers Party, a small Communist opposition party. According to human rights activist Anwar al-Bunni, who also attended the demonstration as an observer, four Kurdish demonstrators were also arrested by the criminal police: Ismail Mohammed, Zubair Haidar, Assad Sheikhan, and Tamar Mustafa.

¶4. (C) Seif was released at approximately 10:00 PM on March 12 by State Security authorities. According to Bunni, Seif had been "shoved" by the security authorities while in custody, but was not hurt. Meanwhile, the four Kurdish demonstrators have been transferred to the Political Security Directorate (PSD) and have yet to be released. In a conversation with Seif's office secretary, whom he sent as an emissary, She noted to Poloff that Seif was in good spirits and "energized" on the morning of March 13. However, Seif was due to attend an interrogation with Fuad Nassif Kheirbek, the director of State Security Internal Branch (Branch 251) at 11 AM the same day.  
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